

The Morals of the Day

ERNEST R. HULL, S. J.

From the Bombay "Examiner."

THERE is a general conviction among all classes of people that the modern world has got into a terrible mess, and the vital problem of the hour is how to get out of it. The Great War is one of the elements of this mess. Grievous calamity as it was in itself, it is proving a still more grievous calamity in its after-effects. One group of nations combined against another group of nations, straining their utmost for the victory. To crush one side and then to exact indemnities was a simple affair stated on paper. But now that one side is crushed, and terms are imposed, everything seems to turn into a two-edged sword, cutting both sides, or into a boomerang coming back to bang the head of him that threw it.

But meantime other disturbances have arisen and come to a head. Capitalism and labor are at grips, and struggling against each other *in the dark*. Neither sees clearly the foe he has to strike nor the blows which are coming from him *till they come*. Here again the proposition reads quite easy so long as it lies on a piece of paper. Capital has over-reached itself, and labor is revolting; but labor finds no other way of asserting itself except by strikes; and now it is being found out that strikes are the ruin of the country, including labor itself. Democratic ideals taking a Socialistic turn suggest the remedy of State-ownership; and yet it is clear that if anything is likely to fail more than another it is State-ownership. Oceans of scorn have been poured out over the head of "bureaucracy," and yet State-ownership means bureaucracy. Destroy private capital and you destroy private incentive, and reduce everything to the dull mediocrity of departmental efficiency—which, outside of the range of red-tape, is incapable of enterprise.

But besides these international and economic questions of the material order, an equal or greater entanglement has arisen in the social and moral order. Everyone is looking

out for some method which will work, and will meet these needs. The ingenuity of the modern mind has invented clever adjustments, which, however convenient they may seem for getting rid of difficulties in detail, are proving, in their general application, a source of demoralization and disorganization tending to social and racial ruin. People tell us that there is a struggle for existence because there are too many people; therefore let there be fewer people. But if from this proposition race-suicide emerges, it does not take long to see that there will soon be too few people—to say nothing of the multifarious evils which arise from the spread of the practise in other ways. People tell us that unhappy marriages are an evil to be got rid of; but if the getting rid of the unhappy marriages is achieved by divorce, the issue soon is that happy marriages turn into unhappy marriages, and marriage itself becomes so precarious that it hardly counts as an institution or state of life at all.

THE FRUITS OF LIBERTY

We will not pursue our survey further. The point we are coming to is this. The modern world realizes the complexity of evils into which it has fallen, and it seems to some extent to realize that these evils have come upon it as the fruits of liberty. And hence arises a dilemma. It is one of the first articles of the modern creed that the only path upwards is the path of liberty, free competition, free self-realization, and freedom to learn by making mistakes—an extraordinary inverted process of rising to the virtues through the practise of sin. Restraints on liberty are at best an infliction of the experience of the majority on the inexperience of the minority for the attainment of the greater good of the larger number. Such restraints are merely a measure of expediency to prevent the minority from getting in the way of the majority; and secondly, they have the effect of conforming the minority to the majority, so that the whole race may march onwards together in the pursuit of progress and well-being. Thus every restraint is reduced to a thing of utility. This or that thing must not be done, because it is inconvenient, and detrimental to something which is worth having. But as soon as the same thing becomes convenient and helps to

something worth having, it is to be encouraged. The idea of right and wrong is practically identified with the beneficial and the hurtful, the beautiful and the ugly. Pragmatism, utilitarianism and estheticism are the only three standards of conduct in the modern world.

By the modern world, however, I do not mean everybody, because there still subsists a very large proportion of people who retain the principles inherited from their forebears; but so far as they do this they are old-fashioned, and not distinctively modern. What we mean by the modern world is that part of it which has developed a mentality unknown say a generation or two back, but which has gradually evolved itself in the minds of thinkers and philosophers, and spread from them as a sort of leavening among those who consider themselves, or are considered, men of their time or up to date. By the modern world we mean (to put it concisely) the *Zeitgeist*, or the aggregation of what is distinctively modern as contrasted with something which was prevalent in the past, but so far as it subsists today is out of fashion and tending to disappear.

THE OLD AND THE NEW SPIRIT

The question now arises: How far are the evils peculiar to this age the outcome of this new spirit, and how far are they an inheritance of the old spirit which it is the effort of the new spirit to get rid of? The waging of war is manifestly an old complaint which the new world is denouncing—not so much because it is immoral as because it is revolting and expensive. The strain between capital and labor is certainly an inheritance from the past; and many of the evils of the present day are necessary evils, just because they are part of the struggle to bring capital and labor into harmony. These ruinous strikes, they say, are merely a form of war which makes for peace, and are a necessary preamble to it. With regard to moral evils, drink at least is an ancient disorder, and it is the modern spirit which is fighting against it. The old-fashioned folk protest in the name of liberty against depriving a sober man of his glass of beer merely because other people make beasts of themselves. They are quite right in their protest; but at the same time it is interesting to find that in this

matter it is the age of liberty which imposes restraint, while the old-fashioned votaries of restraint raise against them the cry of liberty. But the remedy is of dubious success. Humanity, when blocked in one direction, manages to creep through in another; and so where the Prohibition laws cannot be evaded directly, they burrow under ground, and smuggle alcohol through in their pianos or in their medicines, or what is worse, take to deadly drugs instead. If the ancient methods against the drink evil failed, the modern ones are quite as likely to fail.

TRYING TO BETTER THINGS

Still we have here one of the proofs that the modern spirit is not necessarily a wicked one; that it is really trying to better things according to its lights, even at the sacrifice of its most cherished motto "liberty." Moreover there is no question but that it is bettering things in certain ways. We are no blind *laudatores temporis acti*. Leaving other European countries aside, of which quite probably the same is true, it has often occurred to us to think that England only became civilized under Queen Victoria. It was about the beginning of her reign that people ceased to carry weapons about with them, because they found them no longer necessary. It was about the same time that the last duel was fought. About the same time it began to be disgraceful for a gentleman to be found drunk—previously it was his glory, now his shame. About the same time it ceased to be fashionable (or even tolerable) for a gentleman to be an open and professed profligate. It was about that time that a sense of peace and security in citizenship became habitual—security in life, limb and property. Read the history of England in any previous century and what do you find? It is one intermittent record of civil wars, of factions, of slaughters, raids and rapines and private fights. Half the kings of England would have to be put into a cage if they were alive now; half of the aristocracy ditto—and this for two reasons; first, they were a constant menace to the peace and security of those around them, and secondly, in point of personal morality they were a blot on the country. Much sober goodness was, of course, in the *background* in the olden times; and it must be added, much wickedness and

corruption was in the background in Victorian times. . . .

We are not engaged in a historical study, but merely in an impressionist sketch. But what we want to show by the foregoing rough daub of a picture is that our own times are a great advance on the past in many points which go to the make up of civilization. By civilization I mean the reign of law and order, civic and social, making for security and liberty and decency of life; with a general atmosphere of public opinion supporting the law, and looking with reprobation on anything subversive of law. If the modern spirit has gone wrong, it has not gone wrong out of malice. It maintains a certain natural ideal as a standard of appeal, and judges things good or evil by that standard. If the modern spirit looks mildly upon suicide, it does so not out of wickedness, but out of sympathy. If it encourages divorce, it does so not with the object of destroying marriage, but of making it tolerable. If it teaches birth-control, it does so not out of licentiousness, but for economic or hygienic reasons. The modern spirit therefore, so far as it is has gone wrong, has done so not out of a love of wickedness or of lawlessness, but out of a desire to improve things according to its lights.

But its lights are not equal to its necessities. It suffers from mental confusion about the end to be attained and about the means of attaining it. In the spirit of Chesterton we may say that the modern world is a victim of the shibboleths of progress and efficiency. It is stimulated by a passion for progress, but fails to define what it wants to progress from and what it wants to progress to. It is inspired by a passion for efficiency, but fails to define what is worth being efficient about and what is not.

NEED OF PRINCIPLES

Therefore while allowing that the evils of all ages—including our own—are a natural outcome of the weaknesses and defects of human nature, the real and distinctive evil of our modern world is not so much in the moral as in the mental order—a lack of insight into principles. This does not mean that the modern man is so stupid as not to realize the value of principles. It does not even mean that principles do not occur to his mind. What it does mean is rather the lack of *conviction* about principles. Men do

not realize that certain propositions are axiomatic. Hence they cannot adopt them as axiomatic, and therefore feel no confidence in acting upon them and carrying them to their logical issue.

Hence arises a two-fold discussion: What are the fundamental principles which, if adopted with conviction, would provide a solvent to our modern problems? and secondly: How can we get the modern mind to face those principles, to realize their permanent validity, and thus have the courage to adopt them implicitly and act on them to the end?

Catholic writers, speakers and preachers are frequently repeating the assertion that nowhere but in the Catholic Faith are these necessary and efficacious principles to be found. The evils of the modern world, they say, are the outcome of the Protestant Reformation in its root-principle, namely, the abandonment of the authority and teaching of the Catholic Church. Hence the sole and sovereign remedy for the evils of the day is a return to the bosom of the Church. But since such a universal return to the bosom of the Church is unthinkable and unhopable, the situation must be regarded as desperate by those who take this view. The modern world has to be abandoned like a drowning man who cannot help himself and is not willing to be helped, till things have reached the very nadir of misery—and then at last it is to be hoped that the world, filled with husks of swine like the prodigal son, will turn in upon itself, and pause and reflect, and repent, and say "I will arise and go to my mother the Church, and say to her 'Make me as one of thy hired servants'."

This extreme view seems to us plainly impossible to endorse—not because wholly false, but because it is exaggerated and wrongly stated. It is quite true that the Catholic Church does provide, and that in a fully worked out and ready-made form, all the principles which, if adopted and put into practise, would put an end to all our modern evils and bring about peace, harmony and well-being. But mere membership of the Church, or mere belief and acceptance of all she teaches, would not by itself secure the desired end. History is our witness to this. Europe was thoroughly Catholic during the Mid-

dle Ages; and yet if certain evils peculiar to modern times did not exist then, what a mountain of other evils existed instead. And these evils existed precisely because those who had the power to create happiness or misery believed indeed, but did not put into practise what they believed. Membership of the Church would of course do a great deal to get the necessary principles known and believed in, and so give a better chance for their application. But taking human nature, and its law of the members fighting against the law of the mind, this is all one could hope for by mere membership of the Church—an amelioration to some extent, but that is all. It is the consistent putting of Catholic principles into practise from beginning to end on which the redemption of the world depends.

NEED OF DISTINCTION

Secondly, we object to the foregoing proposition on account of its want of proper distinction. The teaching of the Church contains two distinct elements: (1) Natural religion or Theism, such as the truth about God and man and the principles of law and conscience; and (2) Revelation superadded to Theism—that is, the doctrines of the fall, the incarnation, the redemption, sin and grace, salvation and damnation. The Catholic as such takes these two elements together and is hardly interested to distinguish between them; as they are both true, and blend into one system of truth, and both are from the same source of truth, and under the same Divine guarantees. But when we begin to talk to the world outside, and to discuss the principles in which the remedy for existing evils is to be found, we have to adopt another standpoint which is that of the world itself—the standpoint of the natural reason ready to be convinced of truth precisely so far as it is supported by evidence. To the world, therefore, if it is to see clearly the thing which we are offering, the distinction between the natural truths of Theism and the revealed truths peculiar to Christianity is of vital necessity.

Now what I have to say is this. The revealed truths peculiar to Christianity are of course a great help towards the betterment of mankind religiously and morally and intellectually, especially as they pre-suppose those other

truths of natural religion. But the truths of natural religion or Theism without any revealed addition are really the principles which the modern man directly wants. With these he must start, and only when he has grasped them and made them his own is he capable of going a step further, by adding the corollary of revelation. Moreover, in making an initial proposition it is absolutely necessary to prescind from the supernatural or the revealed, because these latter are only attained by faith; whereas the world which we are dealing with has to be met on the sole ground of reason. To introduce the faith-element into the discussion is only to confuse the issue, and to estrange the naturalistic mind of the modern man from the outset. The attitude of the *Zeitgeist* in its best dispositions is only expressible thus:

"I am prepared to accept any proposition which you offer me, as soon as I realize its truth. Show me that my materialism is wrong, that the universe cannot be explained without creation, and that creation involves a personal God. Show me that He is the standard and norm of right conduct, and that His law is written on conscience. Show me clearly what conscience dictates, and get me to realize its dictates in my own soul. Then I will be one with you, and will be prepared to adopt Theism as the key of the modern problem, and to test it and see how far it will work. But to ask me to accept the Catholic Church as it stands, and put myself under its discipleship to learn implicitly whatever it teaches me and do whatever it tells me; that is really too much of a good thing—especially as we are accustomed to thinking that the Catholic Church is an antiquated institution which the modern world has grown out of. I am prepared to listen to anything the Church has to say on my affairs, and take it into consideration on its own merits, and adopt it and make use of it so far as it recommends itself to my mind. But that is quite a different thing from asking me to abandon my own liberty of thought and action, and put myself under the Church as an implicit disciple."

Not only as a matter of diplomacy, but as a matter of reality, concentration on the truths of natural religion is therefore the course we have to take in delivering our mes-

sage to the outside world. Let us preach the Church in its solidarity by all means, for the sake of those who are disposed and ready to walk in the way of faith. But as soon as we enter the philosophical arena, and profess to offer to the world a basis of principles on which to build up a renovated world, it is absolutely necessary that we should take our starting-point from the common ground of natural reason, leaving in the back-ground for the time any reference to the Faith or the authority of the Catholic Church.

ANOTHER DISTINCTION

In the third place, we have to make a further distinction between theology and ethics. The principles which are necessary for the rectification of modern evils can all be stated as practical propositions without bringing in any mention of theology—even Theistic theology—at all. Such principles might recommend themselves to the judgment of any practical man as offering the key to the situation, and might be accepted and put into practise by him on their own merits, and simply as means of securing a desired end, without entertaining any question about God or conscience or any moral obligation. Thus the principles of Leo XIII about the living wage come from him as an exposition of a Divine law of justice binding on the conscience of the employer. But a modern economist who knows nothing about conscience or Divine laws, or even a Divine being, could by the sheer force of reason recognize that the doctrine of Leo XIII is practically a sound one, which offers the only possible basis for a settlement of the conflict between capital and labor. Thus convinced, he might try to put that principle into operation; and if others saw eye to eye with him the experiment might work out with perfect success, without bringing either religion or morality into the case—the principle being regarded simply as an efficacious means of securing an end which all parties deemed it desirable to attain.

The reflection which forces itself upon us is the way in which the modern world has suffered by cutting itself off from the experience accumulated by the consciousness of Christendom in the past. The standard teaching of the Church has stood the test both of practical experience and

critical acumen, generation after generation; and so far as it was observed and put into practise, so far did it save Europe from the evils under which the modern world groans. The evils abounding in Catholic times existed just so far as the Church's teaching was ignored in practise. But at least in those days the Church's standard was known and recognized as a standard, and it always exercised a restraining influence against the spread of excesses, and offered a means of recovery from those excesses.

The modern world has not only drifted away from the practise of the Church's standard, but has lost sight of and touch with the standard itself. In this the modern world can be convicted of a mistake. For not only have the evils common to all ages continued in our age, but some of them have increased and spread so as to have become one might say an established order of things. What is more, the loss of the old standard has cut off all means of retrenchment and recovery. The modern world, just because it has lost the accumulated experience of the past, and the conviction which emerged from that experience, has had to make an unaided fresh start, and to resort to new and untried experiments—which, just because they are not based on experience are almost sure to fail.

The Plot Against Marriage

ERNEST R. HULL, S. J.

BEFORE the split of the Reformation, Medieval Christians had one absolute law about marriage: that it was indissoluble. It was a hard law in some cases; but no compromise was possible. Every expedient could be tried to prove that a given marriage was invalid; but unless this *was* proved, there was no iota of a chance of getting it dissolved. Unhappy marriages there were, undesirable marriages there were; marriages which should never have come off; marriages which one would give one's head to dissolve. But the Church stood firm to its principles, and that was the saving of the situation. The object-lesson was that people must be more careful about their marriages. Secondly, if they have married there is

no getting out of it. The thing is inevitable, and they must make the best of a bad job. It is wonderful how people can find a *modus vivendi* under the inevitable. People who found their marriage unhappy had every incentive to try and make it happy; and people who found themselves drifting into unhappiness were warned to check the tendency in time, so as to preserve their happiness.

The modern legislator has missed this practical lesson. He finds a certain number of marriages unhappy, and says: There ought to be a way of dissolving them. So he invents the divorce law. That is the tiny crack in the embankment which soon wears into a large hole, and ends in pouring the whole contents of the canal out to flood the country.

The primary grounds of divorce were few and serious: adultery, ill-treatment, prolonged desertion and the like. Next "incompatibility of temperament" and other indefinite causes of happiness are added; and the further we go, the slighter are the causes entertained. It was a naïve experiment lacking psychological insight. The moment marriage became soluble for certain causes, it only needed sufficient malice of sufficient ingenuity to place the cause, and the thing was done. If a husband wanted divorce for any reason, he only had to commit adultery, or induce the other party to do so, and the thing was done. The same with ill-treatment, the same with desertion. There was no marriage which could not be dissolved if only one would take the means. Introduce incompatibility of temperament as a ground for divorce, and how easy it is to create incompatibility of temperament. It is only necessary to let the bear or tiger loose within oneself, and the thing is done. The stimulus of the inevitable disappears altogether. If a couple find themselves the least bit unhappy, there remains no incentive to try and recover happiness. There is always the thought: "If we find things getting too uncomfortable we have only to say so, and go to court and secure a release."

Nay, marriage soon began to lose its stability altogether. It ceased to be a lifelong thing, needing serious consideration. It became an experiment which on failure could be given up. It became a conditional union which could be dissolved any time.

Then a further evil followed. At first a divorce was a rare thing, a rather awful thing, a discreditable thing, carrying a stain with it. People read about it in the papers with a sort of weird feeling, as they would read about a murder. As the number of divorces increased, they became as familiar a feature in the papers as races or plays or concerts, and few people there were who did not know of a divorce among the circle of their acquaintances or relations. Nothing breaks down a law of restraint so much as frequent and familiar breach of it. Divorce gradually entered into the catalogue of "domestic occurrences," like births, marriages and deaths. Now it is only the stanch Catholic, fortified by the firm principles of his Faith, that continues to look upon marriage as a permanent lifelong state "for richer or poorer, for better or for worse, till death do us part."

I do not believe that the makers and promoters of divorce laws are actuated by any bad motive. As far as I can see, the secret of the policy springs from a certain sympathy with suffering, and a desire to relieve people from painful, nay often intolerable situations. Compassionate tenderness and the desire to relieve pain and suffering are praiseworthy virtues of the age. But they can easily degenerate into softness, which is a defect incidental to those virtues. Deeper down in the typical modern man one can see that to him the religious and moral traditions of the past have lost all *absolute* weight and authority. There still survives an ethical sense of right, often of a high order. But morality is regarded rather as a group of ideals than as a code of imperative laws. The idea imbedded in the "Ten Commandments" is a thing of the past; and in their place stand certain ethical convictions derived from the human consciousness, elastic and discretionary in their application. Such-and-such is the right line of conduct under normal circumstances. For instance, marriage should generally be regarded as a life-long tie to be faithfully persevered in. But as soon as circumstances became abnormal; as soon as marriage becomes a burden and a misery, surely an exception ought to be made. The marriage tie cannot reasonably be regarded as so absolute as to bind two persons to sacrifice

the happiness and well-being of their lives to it. Let the exception be acknowledged, but let it be regulated by law to prevent abuse.

THE SPIRIT OF SOFTNESS

Into a mind thus prepared there enters the spirit of softness. This tends to dissipate the spirit of heroism and mortification which absolute laws are liable to impose on those who acknowledge them. There is no such thing as the morally "inevitable" which has to be faced and recognized and made the best of in the spirit of self-restraint, resignation and penance. Wherever there is suffering and hardship which can by any means be escaped, it is right to escape from the incubus and resume a life of comfort and happiness. This line appeals all the more as reasonable, just because there is before the mind no notion of heaven and hell, the one to be incurred by deviating from a rigid code of moral law, the other to be attained by adhering to it no matter what it may cost. There remains no clear and definite notion of God the ruler and governor of the world, having the real interests of each creature at heart, and loving it and intending well to it even where appearances are all to the contrary. The only ruler of the universe which survives is the law of nature interpreted human-wise; a code of laws which have for their recommendation the benefits which accrue from their observance, and the damage which accrues from their contravention. Now (argues the votary of divorce) granted that altogether free divorce would be an injury to the best human interests, that is no reason why in individual cases, where marriage is a disaster, there should be no escape from it. No harm, they say, can possibly accrue to these two persons by separating from each other—on the contrary all the harm lies in forcing them to remain together. Therefore let them go free, and put an end to all this misery.

Thus morality is reduced to some kind of utilitarianism. So far as the general law is beneficial, so far should it be maintained; so far as it is noxious in the single case, so far must it be regarded as unsuitable and waived aside.

This comes near to the Catholic principle of *epikeia*, namely, that so far as a law defeats its own end, and

rather produced evil contrary to that end, so far is it not to be enforced. But the Catholic Church, while upholding epikeia as a general principle, maintains that there are some laws so absolute as not to admit of the application of epikeia; and the indissolubility of Christian marriage is one of them.

VALUE OF INDISSOLUBILITY

This is a hard saying, and one which we can scarcely expect anyone but a Catholic to accept; even he will accept it only on faith. Still there is one argument in support of the rigidity of the Church which is gradually making its appeal even to the modern emancipated mind. The rigid law of indissolubility at least excludes just those evil consequences which are gradually following in the trail of divorce, namely, an alarming increase of divorces for weaker and weaker reasons, which not only injures the marriage tie in the concrete, and (what is worse) destroys by degrees the whole notion of marriage being a permanent state at all. When marriage comes to be conceived as a conditional contract soluble *at law*, it is not a long step further to conceive it as a temporary contract soluble *at will*. Hence why marry at all? Why not substitute mere cohabitation by consent, and recognize it as legitimate and respectable, and get rid of all the old-fashioned ugly prejudices which made it disreputable. And when we have come to that stage we are not far from the reign of free love.

Does not this consideration suggest to the thinking mind that whatever criticisms one may plausibly raise against the rigidity of the Church, the Church is after all right? Even as a matter of experience it is becoming more and more clear that absolute rigor is the only way to keep marriage intact. But the Church's law does not claim to be the product of human shrewdness. The Church only delivers what she has received from the Divine wisdom, which with its infallible insight into all things gives to the law that absolute universality and rigidity which alone will save the institution of marriage from ruin. However, in talking to the modern man we do not appeal to the Divine law of Christ: "Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" and the rest. If we did, he would only

shrug his shoulders and think us old-fashioned. We take the modern man on his own ground:

THE EVIL OF DIVORCE

"I presume that it is not your desire to increase unhappy marriages, still less to break down the institution of marriage altogether. What you want is merely to give relief in peculiar cases, where marriage has been a fatal mistake. Yet by your marriage legislation what have you done? In trying to weed out a few tares you have torn up a whole field of wheat. In affording relief in a few genuine cases, you have created a legion of faked-up cases. Instead of eliminating a few unhappy marriages, you have multiplied hosts of unhappy marriages, and in fact created a standing temptation to turn happy marriages into unhappy ones. In trying to make marriage a safe investment by eliminating risks, you have made it an utterly precarious investment full of ordinary risks. You have turned the most stable institution in the world—necessarily stable because on it the security of the family depends—into a speculation and a gamble, a temporary venture which you can give up at will, no matter what the consequences to individual or family or society may be. This you have done in good-faith and simplicity just because you have had to face the question as a *fresh question*; whereas it is a question as old as the world. You have done all this mischief just because you have acted on your own judgment unhelped by the accumulated experience of centuries past. The Catholic Church is the one continuous entity in whom this experience is vested. Nay, at the back of the Church is something more than experience. Behind her lies the Divine wisdom which needs no accumulation, but knows human nature through and through. The Divine wisdom saw clearly that, taking human nature as it was, nothing would secure the stability of marriage except absolute indissolubility."

At first, in dealing with the ancient Jews, a concession of divorce was made for one cause only, and that was adultery. As far as we understand the matter, the reason was a peculiar one. Among a people where early marriage was universal, adultery was the ordinary form which unchastity had to take. Adultery was rife in the environ-

ment, and adultery had to be suppressed. Divorce therefore was allowed for this cause—not as a convenience but as a punishment; and it was considered a punishment so severe that the permission of divorce, instead of encouraging adultery, almost obliterated it. Hence it is that we read so little of divorce in the history of the Jews. I do not remember a single case on record in the Bible—which at least suggests that it was extremely rare.

THE CHRISTIAN LAW

Christians were supposed to rise to a higher standard; and accordingly the temporary divorce-law of Sinai was abrogated forever. In the history of the Church we read of various forms of impurity as prevalent among Christians—as one might expect from human nature anywhere. But at the same time the law of the Church was dinned into everybody's ears. Adultery was recognized as a grave sin; all the clerical and domestic forces were arrayed against it; and so it was kept down. The duty of marital fidelity remained binding in spite of any breaches of it; and thus (except in certain waves of corruption which spread over high society in different countries at different times) the integrity of family life was preserved among Christians as a whole. Whatever failures occurred were individual failures, even when numerous.

In this lies the difference between matrimonial disorders in Catholic times and matrimonial disorders in the modern world. Under the Catholic regime the evil was sporadic, incidental and abnormal; in modern life the evil has become systematic, legalized and normal.

Hence the refrain which will conclude each part of our discussion: The modern world has tried to play the marriage problem off its own bat, and failed, increasing and complicating the evil which it set out to remove. The Church comes forward and re-offers to the world its message—which has been forgotten. If the world will not accept that message as coming from the Divine law-giver and reflecting the Divine wisdom, let it at least accept it as a message of antiquity reflecting centuries of experience. The Church, if asked beforehand, could have prophesied with unerring foresight the failure of the modern experiment. It is now late to go back; but the

more the going-back is delayed, the more difficult will it become. Legislators, at least stay your hand now! Do not increase the evil. Do not open wider the door, already too wide, to the dissolution of marriage. Adopt rather the policy of retrenchment. Instead of relaxing, tighten up. Instead of adding new grounds for divorce, curtail them. Instead of making divorce easier, make it harder. Aim by degrees at reducing it to the rarest and most difficult thing to obtain, requiring long-standing and well-proved causes incapable of human remedy. Do that much at least *now*; and perhaps a generation hence we may see a return to the inexorable law of indissolubility with which Christ began, and which His Church alone has kept up.

REFLECTION FOR CATHOLICS

But it is a voice crying in the wilderness. If the world takes no heed, at least Catholics can derive from this discussion a new insight into the excellence of the Catholic religion, which has ever stood firm against all plausibilities which would argue for at least some relaxation of the marriage law. There are cases in which really, from every human point of view, a divorce would be a blessing to all concerned; a relief from the most awful misery, all the more unbearable because it lasts for life without any hope of cure. Charity, tenderness for suffering humanity, the obliteration of a crying evil, are motives of the noble order which no good man can withstand. If the Church had been merely human, she surely would have given way, and allowed the possibility of divorce at least under very closely defined circumstances. How easy it would have been for the Church, for example, to have seized upon that famous text "except for fornication." The Greek Church has done so; the Anglican Church has done so; no end of well-meaning men of the world have done so. But the Church, in spite of all temptation, has stood inexorably firm to the Divine wisdom; and human experience has borne it out.

Strangely enough, among the stock charges constantly made against the Church by Protestant controversialists and historians, is that of playing fast and loose with the marriage tie in the matter of divorce. Formerly the allegation came from those who supported the indissolubility

of marriage, and blamed the Church for giving it away. Now the same accusation is taken up by the modern votaries of divorce, who resent the obstinacy of the Church, and try to make out that she has in certain cases granted divorce. It was mostly in case of kings and princes, of course, and an evidence that Rome was always ready, for political reasons, to waive her principles.

NULLITY, NOT DIVORCE

Not being at present engaged in controversy we shall here merely give a short explanation. The word "divorce" which in English means a total solution of the marriage tie with freedom to marry elsewhere, is in Latin *divortium* which simply means separation. *Divortium* is divided into two sorts: (1) *A vinculo*, or dissolution of the marriage tie otherwise valid; and (2) *a mensa et toro*, or mere separation from bed or board; in other words "living apart," though still married. The Church never grants the former, but does grant the latter as often as it seems desirable. But there is a third case, namely, where total separation is asked on the ground that the marriage was originally invalid. In this case the Church does not dissolve the marriage, because there is no marriage to dissolve. She merely declares that there was no marriage, and therefore decrees separation. This kind of separation is sometimes, though in a misleading way, also called divorce. The proper term is "declaration of nullity."

Now if you examine all the cases in history where a "divorce" is given by the Church, you will always find that it means either *divortium a mensa et toro*, or else a declaration of nullity. The parties wanting a *divortium* have to show in the latter case that the marriage, supposed to have been valid, was really invalid; and if that is proved, the nullity is declared. Historians, misled by the word *divortium*, and ignorant of canon law, and caring little about accuracy or strict justice to the Church, have gathered up numbers of cases of this kind and used them as a stick to beat the Church with—but quite unfairly and untruthfully. I do not say that mistakes have never been made. It is always possible for unscrupulous persons to take up a case for invalidity, and sometimes succeed in deceiving the Papal Court into declaring null what was

really valid. But if this may have occurred sometimes, at least it is a mishap and not a misdemeanor on the part of the Church. Never will you find in history a case where the Church, recognizing a marriage as valid in the first instance, has undertaken to dissolve it.

The standing instance of the firmness of the Church is the case of Henry VIII. Opposing motives, political and diplomatic, were pressing on the Papacy. To support Henry VIII would have given a mortal offense to Spain and a triumph to France; but on the other hand it might mean the saving of England from schism and separation from the Church. Hence the Popes shirked a decision, and perhaps culpably. But when it came, it was in support of the indissolubility of marriage, no matter what might follow. What did follow was the immediate revolt of Henry VIII against Papal control, dragging the nation with him into the abyss of schism. But even with these consequences before his eyes, the Pope stood firm, although England was lost to the Church.

In Which Class Are You?

IN the preface to "A String of Sapphires," Mrs. Eden's admirable life of Our Lord, written in verse for children, the author well observes:

In this world there are, and always will be, four classes of people. The first, and largest, class consists of those who do foolish things badly; the second and third classes (which cancel each other out with mathematical exactitude) consist of those who do foolish things well and of those who do wise things badly; and the fourth and last class (which is very small indeed) consists of those who do wise things well. Most Catholics (it is on the whole a comfort to reflect) belong to the third class—that is, we are well-principled but inartistic; art being, as St. Thomas says, neither more nor less than the right way of doing things. However, as long as we have a virtual monopoly of the last class (which is worth all the rest put together) we can afford to be hopeful, if not complacent. Our course is clear. We must work as hard as we can to get rid of the two lower classes altogether, and to raise ourselves and all the household of the Faith into the highest class of all.

So perfect is the foregoing classification that there is no one living who cannot be neatly tucked in just where

he belongs. Since all sin, according to Holy Writ, is downright folly, and every sinner is a fool, and even the best of us offend in many things, the vast majority of the human race find themselves, at least intermittently, in the first class. "Those who do foolish things well," seem, on consideration, however, to outnumber "those who do wise things badly," for the common run of men have far more success, for instance, in amusing than improving themselves. In the third class too the dilettanti and the smatterers will always be more numerous than the true artists and honest workers, so pitiful are our achievements compared with our aspirations. But there is great comfort in the thought that we Catholics enjoy "a virtual monopoly of the last class," "who do wise things well." For the Church is the only institution in the world that not only claims to produce those consummate artists in well-doing, the Saints of God, but that actually holds up for the wonder and imitation of the Faithful throngs and throngs of them. The Catholic Church, and she alone, can proudly point to innumerable men and women, youths and maidens, boys and girls, who have been so successful in modeling themselves on the character of Our Divine Saviour and that of His stainless Mother that the Church, protected from error by the Holy Spirit, can infallibly proclaim that these distinguished children of hers, by doing "wise things well," at last made themselves experts in holiness and became saints.